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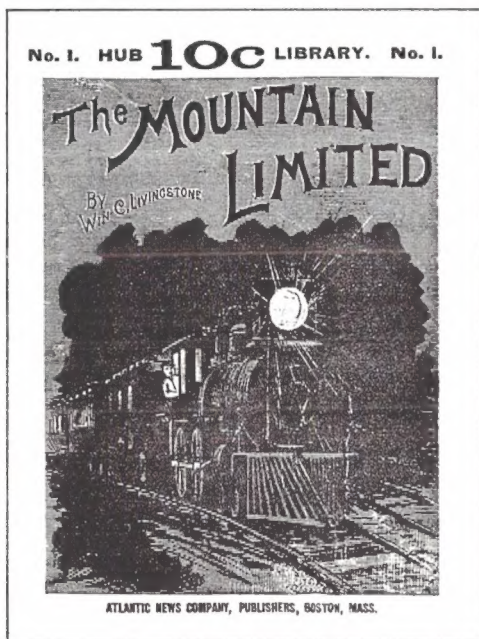
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AMERICAN PROFITS;

MORAL CAPITALISM IN HORATIO ALGER, JR.'S "RAGGED DICK"

By Prof. John Ernest



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AMERICAN PROFITS: MORAL CAPITALISM IN HORATIO ALGER, JR.'S "RAGGED DICK"*

By Prof. John Ernest

Gary Scharnhorst, in his aggressive attempt to "demythologize" Horatio Alger, Jr., has proclaimed that "unlike that modern 'Horatio Alger' who was a best-selling hack writer of juvenile stories about boys who rise 'from rags to riches,' the historical Horatio Alger was a Harvard-educated patrician whose moderately popular nineteenth-century morality tracts for boys expressed his genteel abhorrence of the mercenary Gilded Age" (HORATIO ALGER, JR., preface, n.p.). Scharnhorst is an extreme example of a general tendency among recent critics to separate the Horatio Alger myth from Alger's books themselves.

The seductive promise of such separation is more striking in Alger's case than in that of other writers, for the Horatio Alger, Jr., we know is largely a fictional character created by Herbert R. Mayes, whose fictional "biography"—ALGER: A BIOGRAPHY WITHOUT A HERO—was intended as a hoax and used for years as the definitive authority on Alger's life, to the extent that it was used as the primary source for the entry on Alger in the DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY. Moreover, in 1947 the mythical Alger was institutionalized in the form of the Horatio Alger Awards, awarded (properly enough) to other men who have attained mythical cultural identities—perhaps most prominently, J. Edgar Hoover and Ronald Reagan. Scharnhorst, for one, wants to know how Alger "came to be considered in the twentieth century an apologist for industrial capitalism and a celebrant of mercenary values and business acumen who genuflected at the altar of the bitch-goddess Success" (ALGER, preface, n.p.).

While I am no fan of the "rags-to-riches" myth, I believe that attempts to demythologize Alger do not return us to Alger's works but rather inscribe a new myth upon them—and therefore remind us that Alger produced deceptively simple and clear cultural mirrors for a nation fond of contemplating its own image. We are still confronting the implications of something that A. K. Loring, Alger's first publisher, recognized in the 1870s—namely that "what Alger has done is to portray the soul—the ambitious soul—of the country" (quoted in Cowley, 320). Those of us who would like to effect a change in the spiritual state of American culture must necessarily be interested in a reading of the implicit holy books of the culture—and certainly Alger, in the powerful simplicity of his faith, offers us a particularly attractive subject for study.

The sacred text I will "reread" in this essay is RAGGED DICK; OR, STREET LIFE IN NEW YORK, one of Alger's most well-known and certainly one of his best novels. In this work, as in virtually all of his novels for boys, Alger presents capitalism as a moral system, and America as the embodiment of a form of religion, a systematic perspective that—when allowed to govern individual modes of thought—transforms selfishness into moral behavior. RAGGED DICK argues that the same qualities of character that temptation inspires can be applied towards socially and morally beneficent ends. The virtues Alger promotes do not in any way require a rejection of progress, for the providential America he depicts is one in which virtue is at once a social and a moral achievement, an achievement

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based indeed on "mercenary values" and "business acumen." In effect, Alger promoted what we would now call a Geertzian conception of culture; that is, the consideration of culture as "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call "programs")—for the governing of behavior" (44). Alger's books suggest that those who express faith in the American cultural system by submitting to its "program" would realize the personal fulfillment and social success that the program is designed to produce.

By listing Ragged Dick's faults and virtues in the first chapter of the novel, Alger allows us to see Dick as an admirable but fairly average boy, and to consider his eventual success not as a unique story but as something available to all. Dick's faults are somewhat superficial, a series of bad habits that one might expect from a boy prematurely initiated into the inner mechanisms of the city: he swears, he leads astray unsuspecting visitors to the city, he is extravagant, he smokes, and he gambles. His virtues, on the other hand, speak of an inherently noble character: "He was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one, and had saved him from all mean faults" (7). Alger stresses that he does not consider Dick a "model boy"; instead, he suggests simply, "Perhaps, although he was only a boot-black, they [Alger's readers] may find something in him to imitate" (7). Alger intends his characters as moral exemplars—examples of the potentialities of innate qualities, and of the possible rewards of a determined struggle against worldly temptations.

To this extent it may indeed be said that Alger is predominantly a moralist; but as we watch the ease with which Dick succeeds in his moral struggle, we must consider the nature of the world within which he struggles, and of the rewards that represent his moral victory. The New York of *RAGGED DICK* is a city in the process of rapid growth; and our attention is called not only to what it is like, but also to what it will eventually become. The extensive tour of the city around which the early chapters of the novel are built reveals a city of immense promise, much of which has already been fulfilled. We see such buildings as the Fifth Avenue Hotel, which Alger compares favorably with St. James Palace, and of which he says, "there are few hotels in the world as fine-looking as this democratic institution" (32); perhaps more significantly, we see the Mercantile Library, "comprising [at the time of the story] over fifty thousand volumes," increased, as Alger tells us in a footnote, to almost one-hundred-thousand volumes by the time the novel was written (27)—and we see the Bible House, where Bibles are made. In the process of this tour, of course, we also see New York's darker side: the "swindlin' shop," stock "opportunities" like the "Excelsior Copper Mining Company" which are "got up to cheat people out of their money" (27), and we see a series of swindles and con-games. Yet withal the city is less frightening or disturbing than it is fascinating—and is most potently symbolized by Central Park, "a rough tract of land" which eventually became "the present beautiful enclosure" (48). New York, in other words, is like Dick: at present somewhat "rough and unfinished," but soon to be worthy of comparison to the best that the world has yet offered. And though its mercantile character may be responsible for swindles and cons—as Dick was himself tempted to play fast and loose with his own money—still it is its wealth which will support its glory. Alger, when describing both the best and the worst of these scenes, shows no signs of nostalgia for a simpler, more virtuous time; rather, Alger's eyes are on the future, and on the fine democratic institutions that will supplant the temporary huts of the present.¹

That such extravagant realizations of the democratic promise apply to the individual as well as to New York City Alger makes clear through many of the incidental stories his characters tell us throughout the novel. Critics—noting that Dick, a.k.a. Richard Hunter, is hardly rich at the end of the novel, or even at the end of the "Ragged Dick Series" itself—have qualified the rags to riches myth to "rags to respectability."² But as Dick progresses in his struggle upward in RAGGED DICK, he hears of many who began in a position similar to his own, and who have risen to the top of society: Dick Whittington, who went from saving "pins and needles" to being Lord Mayor of London (30);³ A. T. Stewart, who began as a teacher and became one of New York's most prosperous merchants (39-40); Mr. Whitney, who began with nothing, but "was lucky enough to invent a machine, which ... brought ... in a great deal of money" (55); and a "prosperous" bookstore owner who was once a newsboy.

The effect of such stories upon a boy's imagination—the reader's as well as Dick's—is inestimable. They ask us to see the present as a foundation for the promise of the future, and to measure such relative conceptions as social respectability against the visible scale of worldly success. Indeed, strictly speaking, Dick does not need to rise to respectability, for he is told more than once that all labor is respectable; rather, he needs to attain his own standard of respectability by fulfilling his personal potential, by rising in society according to his abilities, and, as he rises, by dressing and behaving according to his social station. Each station calls for his obedience, his devotion, but no station need be his last.⁴ Dick lives in a world in which "your future position depends mainly upon yourself, and ... will be high or low as you choose to make it" (57). Dick's own goal is open-ended: "he meant to press onward, and rise as high as possible" (132). In other words, success, as defined in Alger's fiction, is not static but dynamic; it is not something one achieves as one would reach a goal—not the "riches" that follow the "rags"—but rather a process, a movement both onward and upward, the "to" in "rags to riches."

The prerequisite for success is not simple virtue alone; indeed, Alger the moralist often encourages us to laugh at, scorn, or pity those who have nothing to rely upon but their moral goodness. Although Alger presents it as a character defect, he clearly means for us to enjoy Dick's propensity to "[play] tricks upon unsophisticated boys from the country, or [give] a wrong direction to honest old gentlemen unused to the city" (6). Alger follows the story of how Dick tricked a clergyman into trying to gain admission to the Tombs Prison with Dick's "delighted" reflection: "I guess he won't want to stay long if he did get in ... Leastways I shouldn't. They're so precious glad to see you that they won't let you go, but board you gratooitous, and never send in no bills" (6). As we laugh at Dick's wit, we join him in laughing at the clergyman; Dick's "defect" seems more than understandable when balanced against the clergyman's gullibility. Later, when Dick and rich, young, and uninitiated friend Frank encounter a young man from the country who has been conned into mistaking the Custom House for the nonexistent Washington Bank, at the cost of fifty dollars, we join Dick in quite another response: "He's a baby," said Dick contemptuously. "He'd ought to know how to take care of himself and his money. A feller has to look sharp in this city, or he'll lose his eye-teeth before he knows it" (51). It is largely through Dick's eyes that we judge this innocent young man.

Tricks and scams such as these make up the greater part of the first half of the novel, and are some of the most enjoyable stories in the novel. We see a New York in which, indeed, one can lose one's eye-teeth, but we

seldom feel threatened. Rather, we marvel at Dick's ability to see through these cons, and to out-con the con-men. It is Dick, after all, who manages to retrieve the young man's fifty dollars. We enjoy the privilege, and relative safety, of an insider's view. Nowhere does Alger break in to warn us that the city is a terrible or dangerous place. Indeed, as he shows us the foolishness of mere innocence, he shows us the foolishness of mere distrust as well, as when the woman on the horse-car accuses Dick and Frank of stealing the wallet which has been in her pocket the whole time. And when the tables are actually turned on Dick, when his bankbook is stolen, the episode shows finally only that the system works, for Travis goes to jail, and the bank clerk makes it clear that Dick was at no time in danger of losing his money.

The city—and the economic and political world it represents—makes its own demands, and offers its own rewards. Throughout the book, Dick's most prominent virtues, the ones Alger emphasizes again and again, are those that will allow him to rise in the commercial world. We are told repeatedly of Dick's energy, his industry, his quick eye for business, and his determination. Twice Alger asserts that these are the qualities that join the bootblack and the most successful businessman: when discussing Dick's fellow bootblack Johnny Nolan, Alger notes, "a boot-black must depend upon the same qualities which gain success in higher walks of life" (125); earlier, Alger phrases the same idea in moralistic tones, noting that "in the boot-blackening business, as well in higher avocations, the same rule prevails, that energy and industry are rewarded, and indolence suffers" (8).

RAGGED DICK is, in effect, a "study" of the seemingly providential workings of what might be called "moral capitalism," a network of influences and cross-influences in which all who are in need, and who are good and industrious enough to help themselves, are given a hand on their way to the top. At the beginning of the novel, Dick is a boy who "had lived without a knowledge of God and of religious things" (79). Religion in itself, accordingly, was unable to guide him; his natural virtue had no institutional outlet. However, "he was so far good that he could appreciate goodness in others, and this it was that had drawn him to Frank in the first place, and now to Henry Fosdick" (79). Of course, Dick had originally been drawn to Frank because "being an enterprising young man, he thought he saw a chance for a speculation, and determined to avail himself of it" (15)⁵; he had become close to Henry Fosdick out of a desire to educate himself—an education begun, significantly, by using a weekly newspaper as a textbook. Frank, of course, encourages Dick to read the Bible; Henry encourages Dick to pray. Dick's initiation into society is both a social and a moral achievement, marked by his first savings account, and by his attendance at a church. "For the first time," Alger tells us, Dick "felt himself a capitalist," and "with ... an important air of joint ownership he regarded the bank building in which his small savings were deposited" (70). Directly thereafter, Mr. Greyson invites Dick to join him at church, causing Dick to reflect, "you're gettin' up in the world. You've got money invested, and are goin' to attend church, by partic'lar invitation, on Fifth Avenue. I shouldn't wonder much if you should find cards, when you get home, from the Mayor, requestin' the honor of your company to dinner, along with other distinguished guests" (72). The church and the bank are equal, mutually complementary social institutions.

To understand Alger's faith in the moral possibilities of capitalism is to appreciate the significance of his most prominent, and most criticized, plot device: luck. In Alger's novels capitalism becomes the necessary vehicle for the operation of Providence. When Dick saves Johnny

Rockwell's life, Johnny's father does indeed exclaim, "God be thanked"—but God having been given His due, the rest of the description invokes the language of business. A boatman says to Dick, "it was a pretty tough job you undertook," and Mr. Rockwell, effusively grateful for Dick's "timely service," tells our hero, "I owe you a debt I can never repay" (128). Later, in a note, Mr. Rockwell makes it clear that his use of the word "debt" was not purely metaphorical: "Please accept this outfit of clothes as the first installment of a debt which I can never repay" (129). A later "installment," of course, would be Dick's position at Mr. Rockwell's counting house, and his assurance of a chance to rise still further. Dick's act was selfless, but in Alger's moral universe this hardly distinguishes it from a commercially successful effort. In a world in which those with sufficient diligence and determination are guaranteed the opportunity to improve their social position, there is ample opportunity for selfless motivations to lead to worldly rewards.

Alger certainly recognized the mercenary temptations inherent in America's fervent devotion to capitalism, but "fame and fortune" (the title of the sequel to *RAGGED DICK*) were hardly dirty words to him. As we watch Dick climb his ladder of success, we are seeing, by implication, the immense possibilities of social transformation inherent in Alger's vision of the capitalistic scheme of things. Dick may indeed remind us that there is "something more than money needed to win a respectable position in the world" (70), but it is only after he begins his struggle upward that he is able to find a moral satisfaction in his natural generosity. Alger does not present his work as the lone voice of one who stands apart from his world and calls for change; rather, he means his work only to supplement efforts already underway "by the Children's Aid Society and other organizations to ameliorate [the children's] condition (*RAGGED DICK*, 1868 ed., vii). His work does not critique the system, it participates in the system, and endorses its values.

Moreover, Alger insists that, as we recognize the truth of the conditions which he dramatizes, we must recognize as well the effectual truth of the dramatizations themselves. In his preface to *RUFUS AND ROSE*, he cites the examples of one boy "filling the position of District Attorney in a western State, another settled as a clergyman, and still others prosperous and even wealthy business men" (viii). Michael Zuckerman, referring to these examples, suggests that "when Alger offered examples outside fiction of the newsboy success story, he cited politicians, journalists, judges, a district attorney and a clergyman before arriving finally at 'still others prosperous and even wealthy businessmen.' Businessmen brought up the rear while public figures led because it was primarily the redemption of respectable citizens Alger sought" (200-201). Syntactically, of course, Alger *emphasizes* the importance of businessmen by placing them at the end of the sentence—and, further, by supporting them with two appealing adjectives, a service not offered to the attorney or the clergyman.

In *MYTH AND THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY*, Richard Slotkin defines ideology as "an abstraction of the system of beliefs, values, and institutional relationships that characterize a particular culture or society," and he defines mythology as "the body of traditional narratives that exemplifies and historicizes ideology" (70). When we turn our attention to the works of Horatio Alger, Jr.,—to his persistent retelling of the same story—the problem we face is not that Alger's stories have been supplanted by the Horatio Alger myth but rather that they so perfectly contain that myth. In his novels, Alger put his own spin on a prominent cultural myth, and worked to realize the possibilities, as he saw them, of a nation de-

voted increasingly to industry and capitalism by inscribing an ideal America in the minds of young future citizens. Our task is not to demythologize Horatio Alger but rather to study the dynamic principles of the myth he helped inscribe upon the American cultural consciousness. As Clifford Geertz has argued, "... we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives" (52). The power of Alger's works—and of the cultural mythology those works came to symbolize—lies in Alger's ability to create clear cultural patterns from an increasingly complex world, and to do so by relocating an increasingly disempowered religious ideal within the mechanisms of a socio-economic system. Moreover, the power of Alger's works lies in his ability to present this cultural ideal not as a portrait but as a process, not as a finished vision but rather as a mode of envisioning, not as a standard of *being* but as a process of *becoming*. In the character of his achievement, Alger was by no means unique—and that is one of the reasons he remains so disturbingly important.

NOTES

¹ Scharnhorst, of course, argues otherwise, though his assessment of Alger's view relies on convenient references to Unitarian theology, and to an examination of standard texts used at Harvard. Scharnhorst never adequately defends the applicability of such references to Alger's works. Since Alger was, after all, forcibly removed from his position as a Unitarian minister, one might question his conformance to his educational and theological background. See also Richard Weiss's assessment of Alger in *THE AMERICAN MYTH OF SUCCESS* and Russel Nye's *THE UNEMBARRASSED MUSE: THE POPULAR ARTS IN AMERICA*.

² At times, critics opposed to the phrase "rags to riches" go to some trouble to argue that Alger's characters do not attain wealth, as when Zuckerman refers to Rufus Rushton's position at the end of *ROUGH AND READY*—a junior partner of Turner and Rushton, Bankers, of Wall Street—as "an undescribed junior partnership." Such hedged bets can be found also in Scharnhorst and Shuffelton.

³ As Whittington became Lord Mayor of London, this is not entirely an *American* success story. However, Alger—or, rather, Frank—does not assign the success itself to any nation, for the king who provides Whittington's great wealth rules over "an island never before known" (30). At base, the story is a fairy tale whose moral—involving the interconnections between diligence, luck, wealth, and respectability—applies best to socially mobile America.

⁴ Shuffelton, in particular, argues that Alger's novels are "recruiting pamphlets for the ranks of middle management" (63), though he ignores the emphasis on mobility in Alger's work. One's end—fame and fortune—is never tied to any specific position, nor is social respectability.

⁵ In the original *RAGGED DICK* story, which Alger changed considerably when he expanded it to novel length, Alger is more explicit about Dick's motivations in the incident which initiates his rising social status, his offer to serve as Frank's guide to New York: "He thought he saw a chance of making a little money" (no. 1, 44).

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MARION MARLOWE IN NEW YORK;

OR,

URBAN IMAGES IN STREET & SMITH'S *MY QUEEN* DIME NOVEL SERIES

By Deidre Johnson

In September, 1900, Street & Smith launched a new dime novel series, *My Queen: A Weekly Journal for Young Women*. Written by Laurena Sheldon, under the pseudonym Grace Shirley, *My Queen's* first thirty issues chronicle the experiences of Marion Marlowe, "a beautiful and ambitious farmer's daughter who goes to the great metropolis to seek her fortune."¹ The "great metropolis," at least for the first thirteen issues, is New York; the stories follow Marion's first year there, as she experiments with a number of jobs and acquires beaux, some wealth, and a knowledge of city life, before finally joining a theatrical company and going "on the road."² The episodes are a blend of melodramatic romances and working girl stories, reshaped to appeal to adolescent readers and to conform to a dime novel format—in this case, one twenty-five to twenty-nine page adventure or mystery per week, featuring a regular cast of characters and a near-perfect, ever-triumphant series heroine. Although *My Queen* focuses more on Marion and her exciting adventures than on New York, it still offers readers glimpses of urban life, seen through Marion's routine activities and social pastimes, through descriptions of and references to buildings and services, through recurring references to transportation and communication, through comments about and characterizations of city inhabitants, and through Marion's reactions to the city. The picture that emerges is an uneven and often distorted one, yet it serves to illustrate one dime novel series' attitudes towards New York. In general, *My Queen* has a tendency to deemphasize the glamour and allure of the city, while highlighting its squalor and misery; it also often slights the landscape and the city's businesses, industries, and government, but is somewhat impressed with transportation and communication systems, and concerned about social inequalities. This paper looks at four elements of city life in *My Queen*:

the government, the roles of transportation and of communication, and the city's social classes. In its treatment of these elements, *My Queen* offers examples of the types of urban images and ideas about New York that one dime novel series presented to its readers.

WORKINGS OF THE CITY—GOVERNMENT: *My Queen's* selection of government services and institutions emphasizes those associated with human suffering or vice, often among the city's poor. Although Marion has numerous encounters with city and state government institutions, the series never mentions politics, City Hall, or many of the branches of state and local government (except for a passing reference to the Board of Health). Instead, readers are introduced to other types of city institutions: Marion visits several police stations; attends police court; works as a nurse at the Charity Hospital—and later, as an unofficial factory inspector; tours the city morgue and the prison on Blackwell's Island; and occasionally refers to Bellevue Hospital and Potter's Field.

In almost all of these settings, Marion is exposed to the indignant and the unfortunate. On Blackwell's Island, working as a nurse, she realizes that: "Inside [the hospital] were the sick, the deformed, the crippled. Women whom shame had driven from the sight of the world, others, whom care, abuse, over-work and under-pay had reduced to that condition known as invalid vagrancy.

"Outside, in the numerous buildings, were other classes—criminals, 'crooks,' 'scapegraces' and prodigals and careworn men and decrepit women—paupers, homeless and penniless at the close of life and dependent upon what some have called a city's charity." In police court, she observes "the poor, the wretched and the vicious...assembled together, and for what? To bear evidence for some crime of another." As a factory inspector, she is told she will meet people "who are grinding the very blood out of the bodies of their human slaves," and on her first full day at work, sees "little children who should be in the nursery or in school... working like slaves in those human beehives [the factories]."

Not only is the government seen in conjunction with human misery, but it is also often shown as corrupt or impotent, allowing suffering to go unabated. As a factory inspector, Marion watches the regular inspector overlook child labor and learns the inspector accepts bribes "for not reporting the condition of [certain] factories." On occasion, *My Queen* includes vague references to "law makers"; these are generally unflattering, as when Marion suggests to a Bible reader that perhaps she ought to read to the lawmakers rather than to the prisoners on Blackwell's Island, or when Marion wonders why the lawmakers are unable to prevent child labor. And in police court, Marion notes that "case after case was disposed of promptly, so promptly that [Marion] found herself questioning the justice of these extraordinary proceedings." Even the police, who help Marion several times and regularly escort her adversaries to jail, don't emerge untainted: they often manage to lose at least one criminal, who reappears in a later issue, and they are sometimes negligent in their duties. When Marion is almost kidnapped outside her sister's home, she tells her brother-in-law: "it is very evident that there was no officer on the beat tonight...for I screamed as loudly as I possibly could, and I only succeeded in awakening the echoes." His response? "'Oh, the cop was probably in the corner saloon,' [he said], disgustedly."

Overall, *My Queen's* treatment of New York's government, business, and entertainment facilities tends to focus on the city's more sordid side.

Marion's survival and successes in the city are exceptions to the norm; all about her are misery, sin, and toil.³ There are perhaps several reasons for this attitude. It may have been echoing contemporary trends

in urban literature, or reflecting Laurena Sheldon's attitudes towards the city; it could also have been designed to discourage young readers from emulating Marion's example and moving to New York; and, at least in part, it simply serves to spotlight Marion's purity and sensitivity when confronted with the vice and suffering in the city.

TRANSPORTATION—and, as a corollary, mobility—is a key aspect of New York in *My Queen*. Transportation is an ever-present part of urban life, as well as a way to link all areas of the city and a way to separate the urbanites from the newcomers. Interestingly, although *My Queen* usually slights its landscape descriptions, it often includes details about transportation—even such items as whether Marion has to wait for a street car or whether she has to change cars to reach her designation. And although *My Queen's* treatment of the workings of the city often omits more types of businesses than it includes, its references to transportation mention almost all types of vehicles—and they are shown as functional, not merely as decoration.

Marion travels about the city frequently, encountering a number of different types of vehicles. In MARION MARLOWE'S NOBLE WORK; OR, THE TRAGEDY AT THE HOSPITAL, for example, Marion enters the tale when she walks into a lawyer's office; from there, she walks to the Astor House, is almost run over by "an express wagon with two powerful horses" and by a street car, is struck by an "automobile carriage," and taken by ambulance to the Chambers Street Hospital, and, later, by carriage to an unidentified apartment and then to her home in Harlem; soon after, another carriage takes her to the docks, where she boards a ferry for the Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island—all in the space of fourteen pages. As can be seen from this example, Marion actually makes use of different forms of transportation; they are more than immobile backdrops. In other episodes, Marion travels by train, by carriage, by street car and electric car, by elevated train, by taxi, by boat, and on foot. All parts of the city are shown to be accessible with the proper transportation.

Transportation—and a knowledge of locations in the city—also distinguishes city dwellers from country visitors and newcomers. Experienced urbanites are not only familiar with most locations in the city and able to readily give directions, but they are also adept at dealing with mass transportation and city traffic. Inexperienced folk are not—and are often placed in jeopardy because of their ignorance. Marion's own experiences best illustrate these points. When she first arrives in New York, she is regularly in need of directions. Even this type of naivete can be dangerous, as *My Queen* reminds its readers in MARION MARLOWE'S COURAGE; OR, A BRAVE GIRL'S STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND HONOR: "On [Marion's] arrival [in New York] she had been sent to the wrong address by Emile Vorse, a friend in the attire of a gentleman...and only rescued...by a Miss Ray, who was kept almost a prisoner in the apartments to which Vorse sent Marion. For Marion, ignorance of city locations catapults her into a near-compromising situation—and she is only rescued by Miss Ray, an experienced New Yorker, who finds her safe lodgings. Transportation is even more hazardous for the newcomer. In the second episode, Marion and her sister Dollie learn of a young boy who was "run over by a cable car...[and] killed almost instantly." Dollie immediately remarks, "Poor chap...He may have been a country boy who was not familiar with the city," and Marion responds, "The cars are awful...I always hold my breath when I start over a crossing." When a man from the country learns of the boy's death, in the third story, he tells Marion, "I reckon he got tew smart with them cable cars—thet's usually the end of country boys and gals thet think they're smart enough tew git on in the city." And in the fourth episode, Marion, for-

getting her "customary Caution" at crossings, steps out into the street and is hit by an automobile carriage. Yet by the seventh story, Marion has learned about the city and is seen giving directions to a farmer and remaining calm when there is a malfunction in the electric car in which she is riding. And by the ninth episode, when Marion is in a hurry: "A [street] car was passing, and she swung herself onto it cleverly, not so much as saying 'by your leave' to either gripman or conductor.

"That was a pretty risky thing to do miss," said the conductor, sharply.

"Marion smiled and handed him her nickel without speaking. She was too amused at her own action to bother with the conductor." Marion has, by then, made the transition from country girl to experienced city dweller and is able to cope with the city's geography and transportation.

A corollary of transportation seems to be movement—of all types. Life in the city, as seen in *My Queen*, entails an almost constant stream of movement. Before arriving in New York, Marion had lived on the same farm for seventeen years, but once she reaches the city, things change rapidly. In one year, she moves from temporary lodgings, to the "top floor of a cheap boarding house," to "furnished rooms," to "a little flat in Harlem," to the Hotel Rosedale, to Mrs. Denison's "'first-class' boarding house," to her sister's home, and finally to Mrs. Stetson's "mansion." Marion changes occupations almost as frequently, going through six jobs in the first ten issues. And, of course, she is almost perpetually in motion in the stories (as are a number of her friends), journeying from one location to another. Indeed, when a character stops moving about, she virtually disappears from the series: Marion's sister, for example, marries a bookkeeper and settles down. She no longer changes residences; she no longer travels to and from work; and soon she no longer participates in the stories.

COMMUNICATION—Like transportation, links diverse parts of the city in *My Queen*. It reaches different areas of New York and different types of people, and it provides information about city inhabitants and current events. Although *My Queen* shows several methods of communication, the most popular form (other than speech) is newspapers. Telephones are used infrequently, mostly for relaying information in emergencies; letters appear more regularly, often as a means of learning the locations of characters as they move about the city; newspapers, however, appear in almost every story, serving a number of people and purposes.

All types of characters in *My Queen* read or refer to the newspapers: the very wealthy, like Mrs. Stetson; the moderately wealthy, like Marion's aunt and uncle; the middle class, like Marion or her friend Alma Allyn; the poor, like Marion and her sister in their early days in the city, or Terence O'Connell. The newspaper provides information about people's activities and situations: when Mrs. Stetson wants a visiting Duke to marry Marion (temporarily her protégé), she has a paragraph placed in the society notes "declar[ing] that she will settle a cool million on her young charge if, at the end of the season, she has married with [Mrs. Stetson's] approval." Mrs. Stetson knows that the Duke—and almost everyone else in society—will see the item and realize Marion has entered the competition for the Duke's interest.

The role of the newspaper in spreading information is seen a number of other times in *My Queen*. In the second episode, soon after Marion and her sister take rooms under an assumed name (in an attempt to escape the notoriety occasioned by their first adventure in New York), their landlady appears at their door and rages: "Did you think because you gave your names as Miller that the truth wouldn't leak out? Well, that shows how

much you know, you little ninnies! Why, I'd have caught on myself if I ever read the papers. The description of you would've given me the tip at once if I'd happened to see it!" The implication seems to be that it is impossible to hide when the newspapers are about, for once they have reported a story, the world knows about it. And on another occasion, when Marion asks a man how he has heard of her charitable work, he responds, "Faith, wasn't it in all ther papers, miss?...Wasn't all yer noble deeds told in glowin' letters, miss, and wasn't it Terrence O'Connell himself who read every wurrd of it?"

Because of their wide readership, newspapers can serve as a means of locating people in the city. The methods can be fairly direct, and be intended for business purposes, as when Marion learns "there is a personal in the paper for Ila de Parloa [her stage name]," placed by the "manager of [a] theatrical troupe," who is trying to get her address. Or, in other cases, the methods can be more indirect, and the results—aside from newspaper sales—quite fortunate. During her time as a reporter, Marion is assigned to gather material for a story re-examining the disappearance of a young heiress, now presumed dead. Marion meets with the girl's mother, Mrs. Townsend. Touched by the mother's grief, Marion is concerned about interviewing the woman: "Our editor thought of reviving the story of your poor child's disappearance, but I hope he will not do it now, for I fear that it will pain you" [said Marion].

"No! No!" cried Mrs. Townsend, plaintively, 'I thank him for his interest... I feel that [my daughter] lives, and it is this publicity that will rescue her!'" Mrs. Townsend's response shows her faith in the press as a means of reaching the public and locating her missing daughter. (And, indeed, the girl is found—though it is the investigation rather than the publicity that brings about her rescue.)

The newspapers also relay current information, as is shown in several cases. For example, the morning after Marion escapes from a burning building: "[Marion's friend, Alma] handed Marion a morning edition of the *New York Star*, and there, sure enough, was a full account of the fire...

"Then there were pictures of the fire...Although it was an array of information which almost staggered her.

"How in the world could they do it so quickly?" she asked..." Marion's question isn't answered, but it is clear she can rely on the newspapers for a source of reliable, detailed information on recent events—"an array of information," complete with pictures.

The newspapers are also seen providing other types of useful information. Marion and her friends read reviews of Marion's theatrical performances, use the "help wanted" listings to look for jobs, read about their own perilous adventures in print, are alerted to dangerous characters at large in the city and wanted by the police, and even learn of the recent activities of friends and relatives who have been out-of-touch. Communication in *My Queen* thus seems to be a means of coping with the size of the city and the mobility of its inhabitants, by providing a variety of current, accurate information. In addition, newspapers seem to be a way of turning the city into a community: inhabitants share the same stories about each other's activities and backgrounds, even though the information is from printed sources rather than word-of-mouth.

INHABITANTS—The city's inhabitants are, of course, a central part of New York and of *My Queen*. They are crucial to the plots, they inspire social commentary, and they are even a regular part of the scenery. Even close relations serve as examples for study.

In the second episode of the series is a brief scene designed to stress Marion's pathos in contrast to great wealth and lack of compassion:

"One night, when the winds were biting and the sky was laden with chilly mist, Marion was hurrying home from another day of fruitless searching [for employment].

"A carriage passed her with its lanterns glowing brightly, and, as Marion gave a sharp glance into the vehicle, she saw her aunt and uncle leaning back in the cushions.

"Oh, this is horrible! horrible!" she whispered to herself. "They are fairly rolling in wealth while their own nieces are starving."

Marion's aunt and uncle never do provide Marion and Dollie with assistance, or even friendship. But, in the eighth episode, when Marion's uncle is murdered, Marion is asked to stay with her aunt for a time and is able to observe Mrs. Stanton more closely. Again, she sees that her aunt is self-centered and almost emotionless, except as concerns her status in society. At one point, Mrs. Stanton seems to be more gratified over the number of sympathy notes and condolences she has received than grieved over her husband's death. During another conversation, Marion asks Mrs. Stanton if she would like to see her sister, Marion's mother, again. Her response? "Mrs. Stanton sniffed a moment and then moved a little uneasily.

"I suppose she dresses as dowdy as ever," she said slowly. "Dear, no, it wouldn't do. Martha would only disgrace me if she came here." Relatives are not important, reputations are.

If *My Queen* seems scornful of the rich, it is also troubled by social inequality, or, as Marion wonders, "Why was it that some should have so much and others so little? Why should she be so utterly destitute of even the necessities of life, while others were basking idly in the sunshine of luxury?" The contrast between rich and poor, or between the beauty of the city and the misery of some of its inhabitants, appears often in *My Queen*, especially in the early episodes, when Marion and Dollie are struggling to earn an adequate income. Working at the Charity Hospital, Marion is often reminded of social conditions in the city: "[the hospital's] windows overlooked a scene of magnificence as well as much that was less inspiring.... The great cities of Brooklyn and New York made a magnificent background to the scene. Spires towered from expensive churches, and at sunset the plate-glass windows of the many noble structures gave back a glow which was almost glorious.

"Thus the city's grandeur and luxury was before her eyes, while its misery was in even closer proximity, for was she not caring for its victims, its slaves and its outcasts in the very wards of this isolated building?

"Oh, to think that such wretchedness should exist!" [Marion] sighed over and over. "To think that with all the wealth and luxury of New York, these poor, poor creatures should drag out such an existence!"

At this stage in the series, *My Queen* is very sympathetic to almost all of the city's poor and unfortunate, even those who have committed crimes. They are victims of society, to be pitied and helped. Shortly before the passage contrasting the city's luxuries with its victims, Marion becomes involved in a long conversation with a Bible reader, as the two ride the ferry to Blackwell's Island. Marion volunteers her thoughts about criminals: "...there are many classes of criminals. There are those who sin through weakness and those who are deliberately vicious. Then, of course, there are the others who sin almost from necessity...Society is all to blame. If conditions were right, there would be very few criminals, and none, I am sure, of the last class I mentioned...When a man's strength is deficient he is not to blame for it...To me [the prisoners] look like poor creatures who never had a chance. No doubt they would all

have been honest if they could have earned decent livings."¹¹ These attitudes change in later stories. As the series progresses, it seems to become less sympathetic to criminals and to the city's lower class. They are not always pictured as victims of society, but as wrongdoers, deserving justice. This change in attitudes is reflected in several aspects of *My Queen*—the characterization of the poor, for example. In the first episodes, *My Queen's* major villains and scoundrels are primarily from the middle and upper class, but later stories use more and more criminals from the poorer parts of the city. The characterizations also seem to become more brutal, until, in the eleventh episode, *My Queen* paints what is perhaps its harshest picture of the indigent. In this story, out of compassion, Marion accompanies a beggar woman to her home; once there, Marion quickly discovers the woman has lured her to her home to rob her; she is soon "surrounded by a group of the inmates of the building, blear-eyed, low-browed men and women, who seemed to spring up from the very floor of the passage....

"Just one breathless moment passed and the whole pack was upon her...

"[They capture her and] without releasing the hold which they had kept upon her wrists, these human monsters set about to rob her of her jewelry." Marion escapes—but only because after the first attack, the group "fell to fighting among themselves like so many tigers...their eyes glittered like those of maddened brutes and they fairly growled with rage as they...clawed at each other." In these passages, Marion's attackers almost cease to be humans; they are virtually reduced to animals, "monsters" and "tigers," growling and clawing. The episode is hardly designed to inspire sympathy for the city's downtrodden.

My Queen does still show some good and honest people in the working class, though they appear infrequently after the first six episodes. There is some difference by gender: generally, when they are shown as a group or as minor characters, poor women are usually pictured sympathetically; poor men, unfavorably. The later *My Queen* stories also often tend to associate many of the lower class with some form of vice—dishonesty, theft, drunkenness, and/or lechery—along with some degree of rudeness and/or brutality. Throughout the series, Marion bewails the misery in the city, but in later episodes that misery seems to be attributed more to crime and vice than to social conditions.

It would be unfair to say *My Queen's* attitude towards the lower class is totally unsympathetic, for it is not. Indeed, the choice of setting for the thirteenth episode—the city's factories and "sweat shops"—seems almost a way of atoning for some of its earlier criticisms, a way of balancing the treatment by again presenting many scenes sympathetic to the working class. But even in this episode, two attitudes emerge. The factory girls are trapped by circumstances and deserve help, but their male counterparts are seen singing "maudlin songs" in the corner saloons. In all, the treatment of the poor seems to suggest a certain ambivalence towards them, mixed with some compassion for their living and working conditions.

CONCLUSION—After one of her many adventures, Marion stops for a moment to think about New York: "Oh, you great, wicked city!" she said to herself, with a smile. "How beautiful you look in this golden sunlight! Still, if it were not for the sunlight, I should wish to die. There must be some bewildering glamour to deceive the senses, for a true glimpse of all the misery would drive one to insanity." To Marion, the "ambitious farmer's daughter," New York is an overwhelming experience, offering both opportunity and tragedy. In the first thirteen issues of *My Queen*, it is also portrayed as a place of indistinct architecture, a city dotted with

government institutions, businesses, factories, and entertainment facilities, many of which are connected with human suffering or vice. It is a city filled with vehicles and people perpetually in motion, a place linked by transportation and communication, where the poverty-stricken coexist alongside the wealthy. Or, as Marion puts it, a "great, wicked city," containing both sunlight and misery.

NOTES

- ¹ Street & Smith advertisement for *My Queen*, back cover *My Queen*, no. 1.
- ² Issues 14-26 follow Marion's adventures as the company travels across the US, giving performances in different cities (one per issue); nos. 27-30 bring Marion back to New York for a final round of weddings and reunions. According to the Street & Smith ledgers, the final issues (31-37) reprinted unrelated romances by Bertha M. Clay [pseud.], mostly reprints from *Half-penny Novelette*. The format for issues 32-37 was changed to story paper size. ("Dime Novel Sketches No. 12: *My Queen*," *Dime Novel Round-Up*, 34, no. 12 [December 1965], 125.)
- ³ The picture of women in the working world often shows them as tired and/or thin. One of Marion's first reactions to the clerks in a department store is pity: "Poor things!" she thought, as she noticed how tired the clerks looked." MARION MARLOWE'S SKILL, p. 12; conditions in the factories, of course are even worse: "As [Marion and her companions] climbed the stairs up to the sixth story, Marion noticed a continual warring of sewing machines, and in the hallways they squeezed past poor, pale-faced young girls, whose frail arms were fairly piled up with pieces of silk and satin.
 "This...is one of the best places in the city. The firm on this floor treats its employees far better than the average' [her companion said].
 "Why don't they open the doors and windows? The place is stifling,' gasped Marion.
 "Why, the wind might blow the [material] about, and minutes are precious here. Time is much more valuable than human comfort.'" (MARION MARLOWE'S CHRISTMAS EVE, p. 4).

* * * * *

REPORT FROM SAN ANTONIO

By J. Randolph Cox

San Antonio. Mild weather after a harsh Winter. Texas cuisine. The riverwalk. Bookstores to explore. The 1991 setting for the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Assn. and the American Culture Assn.

According to the program it was the 21st meeting of the first and the 13th of the second. What the program did not indicate was that this was also the 8th annual meeting of the Area for Dime Novels/Pulps/Series Boks.

For the first seven years I had come only for the Long Weekend, arriving on Thursday, attending some Friday sessions, reading my paper on Saturday, and returning home on Sunday. This year the convention week coincided with Spring Break at St. Olaf so I decided to take in the entire performance. I'm glad I did.

It was an uneventful flight from Minneapolis. On the last part of the flight I played the game of wondering how many fellow passengers were also going to San Antonio for the convention. I pulled out my program and tried to decide what to sample by way of papers and sessions on Wed-

nesday. Earlier I had passed the time reading Charles Ramsdell's *SAN ANTONIO: A HISTORICAL AND PICTORIAL GUIDE*...highly recommended, by the way, in its revised edition of 1985.

The trip from the airport to the Marriott Rivercenter was swift and I met several convention attendees on the ride, including one from Northfield! (We had been alerted by the program book to go to that hotel since there were *two* Marriott hotels in downtown San Antonio.)

It was the usual "eclectic circus," as Don Hutchison of Toronto had termed it in 1990, with presentations on every conceivable subject. "If you think of a topic," I overheard someone on the elevator say, "there's probably a paper being read about it."

I sampled detective fiction, science-fiction, comics, children's culture, and westerns (books, films, television, and history) as well as purely local history topics like the Alamo. It was impossible to get to everything with so many concurrent sessions. Timing, a good plan, and fast footwork made it all possible. One hoped that everything in the program remained accurate, but the cancellation of one paper could throw everything off and trying to arrive in time for the third presentation on the panel one might discover the desired paper had just concluded!

What was there that I would have missed had I waited and come on Thursday afternoon? Popular Culture and Libraries (Collecting, Preserving, and Cataloging Dime Novels and Comic Books), the Early Books of Samuel Epstein (of Ken Holt fame) by Henri Achée, Mike Pettengell on the detective fiction of Richard S. Prather, the talking dolls of Mattel, heroes in cartoons, the evolution of The Shadow from pulp to radio (and back), John Springhall's slides of Penny Dreadfuls (I had met John when he was visiting from Ireland and using the Hess Collection one Summer), the development of myths about the life of Custer (dime novelist Frederick Whitaker cited!), the "new" western (fiction *and* history), the early Fu Manchu stories, the Inspector Mosley novels of John Greenwood, reflections of real academic life in Robert Bernard's *DEADLY MEETING*, the Betsy stories of Maud Hart Lovelace, Sweet Valley series books, the images of women in the Smilin' Jack comic strip, images of the Alamo (including the music of the period and the making of the John Wayne film), and all the others I sampled, but couldn't find time to stay all the way through.

By Thursday afternoon most of the members of our Area had arrived (Jim Evans had been there since the start, as is his custom). I knew Eddie LeBlanc had arrived because I was sharing a room with him and when I moved in I had found his bags already there. (I went to a panel on the Alamo, expecting to find him there, while he went to one on mysteries expecting to find me.) Jack Dizer arrived with Marie and their daughter, Jane, whom I used to keep supplied with the works of Leslie Charteris, but whom I had never met. With our usual quick decision about where we should meet and go to supper, Eddie, Lydia Schurman, and I went off for a cup of coffee in the hotel restaurant. Didi Johnson arrived shortly afterwards (she was sharing a room with Lydia) and (joined by the Dizers) we were soon off down to Riverwalk looking for a good restaurant. (Along the way we had collected Jim Goodrich, John Springhall, Al Tonik, and I apologize for any names I've omitted.) The cuisine was Italian that night.

Eddie and I sampled a few mystery panels on Friday and were equally disappointed to learn that both sessions on George Henty had been cancelled. I attended two or three sessions on comics (often just missing the particular paper I wanted most to hear) and added copies of more papers to my growing collection.

On Saturday, March 30, Eddie and I tried something totally different: a session on sports in society and literature. I was particularly inter-

ested in a paper on Ring Lardner's *YOU KNOW ME*, AL stories and we were both gratified to hear the name of Frank Merriwell evoked.

At 10:30 that morning, the real reason we were there was evident when the panels for Dime Novels/Pulps/Series Books were scheduled. As chair for the session on Gender and Satire, I introduced Jack Dizer and Link Hullar who spoke most directly to our subject. Jack's informative and entertaining look at "Images of Girls in Stratemeyer's Boys Books" concluded that "boys attitudes toward girls were certainly formed in part by their reading, in their impressionable years, of series books"...and that the influence of the Stratemeyer books was significant. Link Hullar's "Virgins, Vamps, and Villains: Women in the Bloody Pulps" examined "portrayals of women in pulp magazines, both general stereotypes and particular characters, Pat Savage, Margo Lane, Nellie Gray, and Rosabelle Newton. While the pulps rarely moved beyond stereotypes, the rare exceptions are significant to this important phase of developing American popular fiction." (Quotations are from the Program Book Abstracts.)

The first session after lunch (12:30-2:00) "Profitable Publishing Post Haste" was chaired by Lydia Schurman. The alliterative title for the session was chosen as the best way to indicate the general theme of the papers. John Ernest's "American Profits: Moral Capitalism in Horatio Alger, Jr.'s *RAGGED DICK*" examined the Alger story as "a historical product of the Gilded Age...[in which he] argue[d] that Alger presents capitalism as a moral system and America as the embodiment of a form of religion, a systematic perspective which—when allowed to govern individual modes of thought—transforms selfishness into moral behavior." He was followed by Eddie LeBlanc's "review of the reprinting of American dime novels in foreign countries, mostly European, and their influence on ideas and thoughts about America." Several of these foreign editions were on exhibit during the panel and other examples were displayed in a brief slide presentation.

In "A Glimpse of Cheap Publishers in Antebellum Boston" Ronald Zboray discussed John Townsend Trowbridge's 1855 novel, *MARTIN MERRIVALE: HIS 'X' MARK*, as a "unique fictionalized account of [the author's] experiences as one of the contributors to the cheap weeklies and pamphlet novels of antebellum Boston. He discusses his vexations with publishers, his authorial strategies, and his notions of the reading public." The session ended with Lydia Schurman's "The Politics and Power of Nineteenth-Century Second Class Postal Legislation" in which she explained that "while the legislation dramatically facilitated the distribution of inexpensive paper-covered fiction, it detrimentally affected the regular book trade and American authors."

The Western Theme was evident in the third session held from 2:30-4:00. Kathleen Chamberlain chaired this session which began with Jim Evans's paper on the "Portrayal of Bigfoot Wallace in Beadle Dime Novels." "After migrating to Texas in 1837, Bigfoot Wallace (1817-1899) became a legendary figure because of his encounters with Indians and Mexicans, his luck, his tall tales, and his great stature and strength. Long before old age, he also became a character in dime novels" (Program Abstract). Al Tonik continued the theme of his paper on the authorship of the Jim Hatfield stories (St. Louis, 1989) by discussing the authorship of some of the short stories about continuing characters published in Ned Pine's pulp magazines in "The Authors of Western Series Stories in Standard Magazines." I followed with my survey of some of the stories in which Nick Carter left New York to investigate crimes in the contemporary West and the use of some historical characters in the fictional accounts (NICK CARTER OUT WEST; OR, THE GREAT NEW YORK DETECTIVE IN A NEW SETTING). The last paper, "Images of the West in Children's and Adolescents' Series Fiction," by

Kathleen Chamberlain, discussed how these "books portrayed 'The West' as an exotic place of alien dangers, unusual characters, and thrilling adventures while at the same time perpetuating the myth of 'The West' as an emblem of American diversity, independence, courage, and ingenuity."

The fourth session, "The Writing Life and a Dime Novel Roundup" featured Arlene Moore's "A Portrait of a Writer: The Letters of Harriet Lewis to Robert Bonner." The letters "show Harriet as an exuberant person sometimes critical, unhappy, wildly enthusiastic, and quick to take offense. Indirectly [they] also show Bonner as a carefully nurturing editor, friend, banker, mentor, and on occasion her conscience."

The "Dime Novel Roundup" gave us an opportunity to assess the conference just past and to plan for the future. I will continue as Area Chair for another year, but will be succeeded by Kathleen Chamberlain in 1993. The Area for Dime Novels/Pulps/Series Books officially "adopted" the Hess Collection, University of Minnesota, and formed a Friends of the Hess Collection as a support group for the library collection so many of us have used. There will be more about the activities of the Friends of the Hess Collection in the months to come.

Some of us decided to stay an extra day to avoid the rush of travel on Easter Sunday. Eddie, Lydia, and I did some sightseeing, visited a couple of additional restaurants, and concluded to add an extra day to our itineraries in the future.

Next year: Louisville, KY, March 18-21, at the Galt House. Try to attend, sample sessions, join in discussions and talk about your interests and ideas. You need not belong to either the PCA or ACA to stop by to say hello (only if you want to be on the program). You needn't register for the full convention either, but may decide you want to. Questions may be sent to me at 10331 Decker Ave., Northfield, MN 55057, or call me at 1-507-645-5711.

* * * * *

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